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The War Generation and Generation Wars: Writing the Memory of French Veterancy, 1919-1945

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The War Generation and Generation Wars: French Veterans and the Association des Écrivains Combattants, 1919-1945

This article examines the ways in which veteran writers, notably through the activities and publications of the Association des Écrivians Combattants [Association of Combatant Writers], were essential to the conscious elaboration of a generational identity amongst French veterans in the interwar years. In particular, it explores how the AEC constructed the war generation in France, examining how its successes, limitations, and legacy beyond the First World War illustrate the ambiguities surrounding the notion of generation. It shows how the AEC mobilized the memory of the war through a range of commemorative textual practices centring on the figure of the dead combatant author in order to assert the rights, interest, and moral authority of French veterans in a society that the latter now sought to 'correct' through the example of their generation's sacrifice. It will also explore the political choices this led AEC members to take, focusing in particular on the ambiguous relationship veterans entertained with the French Republic. Finally, it places veterans' struggle within a pattern of generational politics and conflict that characterizes twentieth-century France and which would see the veteran of World War One supplanted by another generation of veterans: those who had resisted Nazi occupation and collaboration during World War Two.

What determines a generation and the role it plays in constructing collective memory have been a subject of debate since the sociologist Karl Mannheim first considered the term as a social category in the late 1920s (Pickering and Keightley, 2012: 115). Is a generation determined by a particular date or set of historical or political events? How long does a generation last? Is it a conscious or unconscious construct? What characterizes the relationship of the individual to generational identity? Faced with such questions, the concept of a war generation, and particularly of the First World War generation, seems relatively unproblematic. In France, mass conscription targeted a specific social group (men aged 18-

40) who were forged into a single body through the shared experience of combat over a given period of time (1914-1918) and who would subsequently gather through veterans' organisations to remember their suffering, to celebrate their camaraderie, and to remember their dead. The war generation in France would appear to exist as an empirically observable group corresponding to a particular gender, demographic, and historic moment, one that, intensely aware of its own existence, corresponds closely to Mannheim's original definition of a generation (Pickering and Keightley, 2012: 115-17), but, as the broad ages of conscription above suggest, one that is primarily determined by social rather than biological age (cf. Sapiro, 2002: 392).

As this article will illustrate, veteran writers, notably through the activities and publications of the Association des Écrivains Combattants [Association of Combatant Writers; hereafter AEC], were essential to the conscious elaboration of a generational identity that was subsequently expanded to all those who had defended France in these years. This article will explore how the AEC constructed the war generation in France, examining how its successes, limitations, and legacy beyond the First World War nonetheless illustrate the ambiguities surrounding the notion of generation. It will show how the AEC mobilized the memory of the war through a range of commemorative textual practices centring on the figure of the dead combatant author in order to assert the rights and interest of veterans in a society that veterans now sought to 'correct' through the example of their generation's sacrifice. It will also explore the political choices which this led AEC members to make and the consequences for French veterans, placing their generational struggle within a pattern of generational politics and conflict that characterizes twentieth-century France.

Founded in 1919, the AEC sought to group together writers who had seen uniformed service in order to defend their post-war professional interests, but also to recall and commemorate the name and works of those of their profession who had died during or in the

wake of that conflict.[1] The AEC existed primarily as a support network for veteran writers returning to civil society and disorientated by the 'aggressive egotism' they now found at work there, as well as the families of those who had not survived the conflict (*Annuaire*, 1927-28: 5).[2] It was in principle an apolitical movement that, particularly in its early years, assembled writers of all political shades. It also formed part of a broader movement of French veteran organizations which together, according to Antoine Prost, promoted the idea that 'the war [had] introduced a decisive generational rupture: a before and after' (1977b: 135) leading to an insurmountable opposition between veterans and an older generation of political leaders (1977b: 136). Indeed, for Robert Wohl, this rupture was already evident during the war itself 'in the feeling [among combatant writers] that it was there amid the fire and flame that the new world was coming into being' (1980: 222). For Bruno Cabanes, however, it was not until the 1920s that the concept of the *génération du feu*, as it was known in French, emerged (2007: 141). The AEC, as we shall see, was central to the elaboration of what was essentially a post-war discursive formation. In its dedication to the cult of the war dead and its commitment to remembering the war experience, the AEC reflects Pierre Nora's assertion that 'Each generation is the product of memory, the result of a conscious attempt to remember, [conceived] through difference and opposition' (1992: 956). As this article will illustrate, however, the conceptualization of a generation responds as much to a sense of external difference as it does to a recognition of internal differences.

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[1] Article Two of the AEC's constitution, which was originally approved on the 29 June 1919 and is republished in the *Annuaire de l'Association des Écrivains Combattants de 1914 à 1918 (1927-1928)* (1927-28). Since World War Two the AEC has been expanded to include all conflicts in which French writers have been involved.

[2] All translations are my own except where indicated. For a brief history of the AEC's early years, see Beaupré, 2006: 236-47.

The article will begin by exploring how the AEC constitutes a 'community in mourning', as defined by Stéphane Audouin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker: a community that offers a social structure through which members can mediate and work through personal grief (2000: 231-32). The resulting socialized memory of the dead forms the basis of a collective identity that stands in contrast and often opposition to non-combatant society. Here I will argue that veteran writers draw upon the moral authority of those who died in the name of the nation, claiming to embody not only their memory but their will, in order to make socio-political claims for survivors. In this way the AEC seeks to develop a generational identity amongst all French veterans through a nexus of 'politics and literature, power and words, understood here in their transformative magic; that is to say, their poetry' (Nora, 1992: 947) and to mobilize veterans in intergenerational conflict considered by June Edmunds and Bryan Turner as the hallmark of modernity (2002). Writing, then, is central to the construction of the socio-political entity that is perceived as a generation and particularly to the endeavours of French veterans, even if, as Chris Millington observes, these claimed to '[favour] actions over words' (2012: 6). But it is also, as Nora suggests, a means to transform the present through a particular shared memory of the past. I will therefore also consider the AEC's engagement with the politics of interwar France, its ambiguous relationship to Republican democracy and the support of many of its leaders and membership for the autocratic Vichy regime and its leader, Marshal Philippe Pétain, during the Occupation. I will argue that, far from preserving the Republic from fascism, as Prost claims (1977b: 217-23), a significant body of veterans and certain key veteran writers, however indirectly, helped prepare the Republican regime's collapse. I will conclude by examining how, despite and indeed because of significant internal political divisions, the AEC reflects a fundamental tendency towards generational thinking and tensions that characterize twentieth-century French political culture

and where generations form not only in opposition to one another, but in order to address and mask their own internal incoherence and contradictions.

Writing, mourning, and commemorating the Dead (1914-1926)

The AEC is one of many veterans' organizations to emerge in the immediate post-war period in France. As Prost's exhaustive study has revealed, these were diverse in scope and individual movements often corresponded to particular forms of service, regions, or even types of wounds received in combat. The AEC belongs to a group of organizations based on members' professional identity. Its origins lie, however, in the *Bulletin des écrivains* [Writers' Bulletin] published as early as November 1914 and circulated in the trenches among 'writers called to armed service' (*Bulletin*, 1914). Whilst early issues contained obituaries of the most prominent writers, details of those injured or taken prisoner, contact details of fellow writers in the services, and excerpts from recent publications, by 1916 the *Bulletin*'s main function had become the recording of combatant writers' deaths. In contrast to its original nationalistic tone, sustained with regular contributions from armchair enthusiasts for mass-slaughter such as Maurice Barrès, the July 1919 issue was dedicated through an anonymous poem to writers of all nationalities: 'Born to speak to other men/They sacrificed in the same heroic action/Their life and their promise/Dead so that their silence might speak' (*Bulletin*, 1919). Between 1914 and 1919, and as the number of dead mounted, it became a memorial dedicated to hundreds of young French writers, the most prominent of whom were Alain-Fournier and Charles Péguy, both of whom died in 1914, and Guillaume Apollinaire, who survived the war only to die from Spanish flu in 1919. The compulsion to list the individual dead, to save each and every writer from the anonymity of mass, industrialized warfare, and thereby to prolong his presence among a living community,

anticipates an anxiety that will be translated to national level in the wake of the war (Julien, 2009: 91-92).

The same memorialist function is assumed by the AEC in its manifesto of June 1919 and in its aim 'to maintain the cult of memory of those comrades who fell on the field of honour', alongside a commitment to defend the professional interests of veteran writers in what is almost immediately construed as a hostile post-war literary environment.[3] As Nicolas Beaupré notes, the manifesto denotes a clear sense of before and after and its signatories, drawn from across the political spectrum, reflect a common sense of frustration amongst writers and intellectuals returning from combat (2006: 242-45). The *Bulletin des écrivains* now becomes the *Bulletin des écrivains combattants*, but the AEC and its leadership are also the driving force behind a series of other publications through which these two objectives are pursued: the five volumes of the *Anthologie des écrivains morts à la guerre* [Anthology of Writers Killed in War] published between 1924 and 1926, the *Conteurs du vieux logis* [Tales from the Old House], a series of volumes of short stories by veterans designed to promote their most recent writing, and *La Revue des vivants* [The Review of the Living], a monthly political and literary review that ran from 1927 to 1935.

The anthologies, despite their memorialist intent and retrospective focus, are essential to understanding the moral, civic, and ultimately political role that veteran writers are seeking to carve out for veterans more generally in the interwar period. Each anthology followed the same pattern, publishing an extract from every one of the 500 or so French writers killed in uniformed service, alongside an obituary written either by a family member or, more usually, a fellow writer and veteran. For Roland Dorgelès, the anthologies offered a way of combatting the anxiety he felt at the disappearance of writers 'whose name in order to survive can often only call upon a few scattered pages, a handful of notes or verses.' 'Who knows,'

[3] Article 2 of the AEC's constitution.

he goes on, 'in which trench the child genius who would have set the world alight may have fallen?'.[4] Given that the aim of all writers is to live on in the written word, the loss of so many debutants is doubly cruel, according to René Doumic.[5]

The anthologies thus served as a vehicle for collective mourning, allowing the dead to live on through their own written word. They are, for Georges Lecomte, '[a] vast well-ordered cemetery full of flowers' where every page evokes a fleeting memory of a dead artist.[6] Their purpose was, as the journalist and politician Henry de Jouvenel wrote in the foreword to the first anthology, to 'prolong their memory [of the dead] instead of allowing it to ossify'.[7] For José Germain, a founding member of the AEC, the anthologies enable him to recall the presence of the dead; dedicating his preface to one fallen comrade, he writes: 'I find you again after eight years of desperate separation, at once dead and immortal'.[8] There is in these writings an anguish that Freud, writing in the aftermath of the same conflict, perceives in the process of mourning whereby the ego realizes 'that the beloved object no longer exists, and demands that the libido as a whole sever its bonds with that object' (Freud, 2005: 204). The anthologies allow a process of mourning whereby individual writers can publicly grieve their fallen friends, express the pain of individual loss, recall them to life through the obituary

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[4] *Anthologie des écrivains morts à la guerre (1914-1918)* (Amiens: Bibliothèque du Hérisson, Edgar Malfère, 1925), vol. 3, xii and xv respectively.

[5] Doumic, editor of the leading literary journal *Revue des deux mondes* and member of the prestigious Académie Française, was too old to be conscripted during the war. *Anthologie des ècrivains morts à la guerre (1914-1918)* (Amiens: Bibliothèque du Hérisson, Edgar Malfère, 1926), vol. 4, vi.

[6] *Anthologie des écrivains morts à la guerre (1914-1918)* (Amiens: Bibliothèque du Hérisson, Edgar Malfère, 1924), vol. 2, viii-ix.

[7] *Anthologie des écrivains morts à la guerre (1914-1918)* (Amiens: Bibliothèque du Hérisson, Edgar Malfère, 1924), vol. 1, v.

[8] Vol. 2, xiii.

and the dead's own final written words, and express anxiety at, but also acknowledge, their passing.[9] For Lecomte, it is in the anthologies that 'the dead live. They speak.'[10] According to Robert de Flers, they offer 'the living thought of those who are no longer with us […] for us to reflect upon.'[11]

Like Freud's mourner, the writers who contribute to the anthologies lionize the dead. In his preface to the first anthology, the novelist Henry Malherbe, first president of the AEC, explicitly mourns 'this generation which had achieved a point of human perfection' and whose loss diminishes the survivors: 'We continue to suffer from this head wound.'[12] Indeed, for Gustave Geoffroy, all who died for France, by their very sacrifice, are heroes and 'have the right to the same afterlife, the same glory.'[13] A cult of the dead is thus established in these writings. Indeed, for Malherbe, each obituary constitutes a sort of holy statue 'carved and decorated with both precision and fervour' before which 'One can kneel […] and pray.'[14] The memory of the dead must guide the living as it was in the confrontation with death that the dead writer discovered truth, transcribing this in his final words.

Malherbe, addressing the dead directly, thus admits to a feeling of inadequacy before the dead.[15] However, while the mourner idealizes the departed and may feel 'a great

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[9] For a discussion of the distinction between grief and mourning, see Audouin-Rouzeau and Becker (2000: 202).

[10] *Anthologie*, vol. 2, ix.

[11] *Anthologie*, vo. 3, v.

[12] Ibid., p. xii. Malherbe was also an apologist for the paramilitary far-right group Les Croix de Feu, led by the former war hero Colonel de la Rocque.

[13] *Anthologie des écrivains morts à la guerre (1914-1918)* (Amiens: Bibliothèque du Hérisson, Edgar Malfère, 1926), vol. 5, vi.

[14] *Anthologie*, vol. 1, xi.

[15] Ibid., xiv.

impoverishment of the ego', the ego comes to realize that, in order to continue to enjoy 'the sum of narcissistic satisfactions that it derives from being alive [it must] loosen its bonds with the object that has been destroyed' (Freud, 2005: 205; 215). The anthologies serve a valedictory purpose for Dorgelès who announces: 'The time has come to seal the funereal tomb. This is, then, the last time we shall speak of them…'.[16]

Yet, if the idealization of the dead constitutes a stage for Freud through which individual mourners pass on their way to a reaffirmation of life, within the collective context of the AEC and France's veteran community more generally, the cult of the dead principally serves another purpose: that of confirming and valorizing the existence of a broader war generation. In the same preface, Dorgelès declares that the raison d'être of the AEC is to 'preserve in a time of peace a certain *esprit de guerre*', a spirit that the survivors have inherited from the dead as 'Our greatest claim is to be the friends of the dead. We alone, comrades, have not forgotten you'. The anthologies are therefore 'the testament of a generation' and the AEC is cast as spokesman for the dead.[17] For Jouvenel the anthologies reflect direct communication between the fallen and the surviving veteran: 'the disappeared reappear; their reanimated souls communicate once more with ours'.[18] The veteran contains within him the thoughts, memories, and the very soul of his fallen comrades, but also carries in his own written word the truth and authority Malherbe had discerned in the dead. The dead lend an aura to the surviving veteran writer who becomes the bearer of this truth and who perpetuates the memory of this spiritual elite through his own activities.

The anthologies must be considered an essentially commemorative process rather than a pure expression of personal mourning therefore. Indeed, for Audouin-Rouzeau and

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[16] *Anthologie*, vol. 3, xi.

[17] Ibid., xvi.

[18] *Anthologie*, vol. 1, v.

Becker the cult of the war dead prevents the separation of the living from the dead and impedes mourning (2000: 255-56). In this way the anthologies are more akin to the collective commemorative practices examined by George Mosse whereby the dead are called upon in order to influence the behaviour of those who have survived them (1990: 79-80). Yet they also reveal in their combination of personal mourning and collective commemoration the social dimension of the cult of the dead, which, according to Élise Julien, can never be entirely politically neutral (2009: 74). Following Maurice Halbwachs (1992: 171-73), the private memories of individual contributors to the anthologies are therefore mediated and indeed orchestrated through the collective memory of the AEC so as to contribute to the construction of a collective, public identity which defines itself in opposition to what it perceives to be the dominant, antagonistic forces of French society in the 1920s.

Indeed, despite its avowed apoliticism, the AEC frequently indulges in a social critique which draws it into the realm of the political. This critique derives in general terms from all veterans' 'deception with this ungrateful, selfish and cut-throat post-war world' before which, according to Germain, the dead would cry: ' "This is not what we wanted" '.[19] Claude Farrère goes so far as to claim to envy the dead: 'Happy are those who did not doubt the virtue of their sublime sacrifice! Happy are those who have not seen what we have seen, who have not known our victors' sadness'.[20] The novelist Pierre Benoit, in the preface to the fifth and final volume, thus turns attention away from the dead and to the survivors who have been 'exposed to a thousand and one humiliations, a thousand and one injustices since the end of the war', and quotes with bitterness Georges Clemenceau's famous dictum from 1917

[19] *Anthologie*, vol. 2, xvi.

[20] *Anthologie*, vol. 4, xii.

regarding French combatants: 'They have certain rights over us'.[21] Far from seeing themselves eulogized through their association with combat and the fallen, placed at the heart of the 'nation's self-representation in its war monuments and military cemeteries', as Mosse writes (1992: 74), French veterans of the AEC felt themselves confined to the margins of life, still unable in the mid-1920s to reclaim the social roles which had been theirs, let alone to enjoy recognition for their past sacrifice.

Beyond mourning: socio-political engagement (1927-1939)

For Robert de Flers, dead writers enjoyed an enviable fate, 'offering their chests [in order to defend] the genius of the French race which, suddenly, violently, yet tenderly, had asserted itself over their reason'. By way of contrast, the peasants who made up the bulk of the French infantry were merely defending their land. Combatant writers were nevertheless at the forefront of a national movement of defence which saved French national integrity and civilization.[22] The AEC can therefore claim to speak on behalf of the entire war generation and not only its members. With this in mind, Jouvenel and Malherbe created *La Revue des vivants* in February 1927, thereby helping to turn the attention of the public back onto surviving veterans and to expand the AEC's activities into the socio-political arena.

This monthly review, to which various notables of the AEC would contribute until it folded with the death of Jouvenel in 1935, proclaimed itself apolitical but nonetheless 'open to all ideas'. It therefore welcomed contributions from the leaders of prominent veteran movements as well as those it saw as the leading writers and thinkers of the day. These were

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[21] *Anthologie*, vol. 5, x. This volume is also dedicated to those veterans who have died of wounds and illness since the cessation of hostilities.

[22] *Anthologie*, vol. 3, vi-vii. De Flers was a playwright and literary editor of the national daily *Le Figaro* who undertook diplomatic work for France during the war, which perhaps goes some way to explaining the idealized version of death in combat he was able to maintain even after the war.

largely, but not exclusively, French veterans. It marketed itself as a series of studies of the post-war world, considering international affairs (dedicating issues to fascist Italy and Franco-German relations, among others), domestic politics (examining demands for the reformulation of the Republic, as we shall see below) and literature (with special issues on Tolstoy, the fantastic, and colonial literature). It continued to promote veteran writers' work in line with the AEC's original manifesto, but the majority of issues were given over to international affairs and domestic politics, the review operating as a forum for discussion.

The period 1927-1935 was an eventful one for French veterans. Throughout the 1920s there had been a discernible degree of political and social disorientation amongst veterans as they struggled to adjust to the post-war world, and as Benoit's preface to the final *Anthologie* suggests. This struggle was equally a cultural one, as Thierry Sandre made clear in his first contribution to *La Revue* in an essay titled 'Un abîme entre les générations' [A chasm between the generations]. Here Sandre attacks Paul Souday, the literary critic of *Le Temps* who had recently derided novelists of the First World War for their inability to translate the war experience into a new literary form, stating of the war: 'it did not create a chasm. Although a tragic episode, it merely altered the map of Europe and not the intellectual face of the civilized world.' Combatant writers, he contended, 'mistake their mole hill for the Caucasus, because it's theirs and because they really saw nothing.'[23] In response, Sandre charges that the war revealed human nature, stripping away the mask of civilization, and that writers of the pre-war era no longer possess the ability to alter human consciousness. Souday is merely protecting the interests of defunct literary forms of no relevance to the war generation whom he now summons to his support: 'Veterans, did you hear? Have you ever been so obviously and publicly misunderstood? Your Golgotha was a mere mole hill…'

[23] Quoted in Thierry Sandre, 'Un abîme entre les générations', *La Revue des vivants*, February 1927, 1:134-8, 137.

Souday and his generation 'died 2 August 1914', he concludes, as he commits the *Revue* to the defence of the literary and professional interests of those writers who saw combat and who are the expression of a generation marginalized by those who seek to turn their back on the war.[24]

If Sandre identifies 'an unbridled bitterness, a certain energy' in the output of all veteran writers, making of them a generation if not a literary school,[25] he, like the AEC and other veteran organizations, was trying to 'maintain the illusion of a community existing between a profoundly different and diverse body of men' (Prost, 1977b: 221). This diversity extended beyond the cultural to include the political. Many veterans' movements, like the AEC, were officially apolitical. One of the principal movements, the Union Nationale des Combattants (UNC) [National Union of Combatants], as Millington reveals, nevertheless shared 'certain ideas and an antidemocratic attitude […]' (2010: 547) with more radical right-wing paramilitary groups such as the Croix de Feu, it too originally a veteran movement. The Association Républicaine des Anciens Combattants (ARAC) [Association of Republican Veterans], however, was communist in outlook (Millington, 2015). There was, then, no single, unified veteran movement, party, or even vision which could be deemed to reflect all veterans' interests. The battle for the recognition of veterans' pension and disability rights throughout the 1920s was in part hampered by a lack of political and indeed generational unity among veterans. Veteran disorientation in the early and mid-1920s was therefore as much political as it was social and cultural. The attempt to forge a single generation from veterans can therefore be seen to respond as much to the recognition of a lack of internal coherence as it can to a sense of a shared identity in opposition to all that was the non-

[24] Sandre, February 1927: 137-8. Sandre was also a founding member of the AEC and would join the ranks of French intellectuals who defended Pétain's National Revolution during the Occupation.

[25] Thierry Sandre, 'Les Lettres', *La Revue des vivants*, April 1927, 1:488-89, 489.

combatant Other. The attempt by the historian Jean Norton Cru in 1928 to define who exactly could claim to be a veteran, and who therefore possessed the right to write about the war, can therefore be viewed as both an attempt to define the war generation through external difference and to limit internal membership and to impose some coherence by excluding not only civilians but also nurses, prisoners of war, aviation and naval forces, and commanding officers all in the name of coherence (Norton Cru, 1929: 9-10).

It was not until 1930 and the appointment of the former combatant André Tardieu as prime minister that veterans felt that they were beginning to gain the social recognition and prominence that was their collective due. That year, Dorgelès could claim, in a speech delivered at the AEC's annual banquet, and in Tardieu's presence, 'Today, after ten years of effort, we have all taken up our places once more. Each of us has regained his rank by dint of hard work and […] I can go so far as to say we now occupy the bridgeheads'.[26] This coincided with attempts by veterans' movements to extend their demands beyond members' immediate material concerns to include much broader civic and political issues. Following the creation of the Confédération Générale in 1927, which drew the majority of veterans' organizations into a single federation, there was a sense that veterans could finally form a cohesive whole and directly influence society. Moreover, the early 1930s also saw a growing association of the AEC with Republican institutions. The definition of veteran identity through opposition to the political was therefore not quite as absolute and characteristic of the interwar years as Millington suggests (2012: 7-9). After all, Tardieu himself was an AEC member, as was Gaston Doumergue, a former President of the Republic, while his successor, Paul Doumer, was assassinated at an AEC book festival in 1932. Indeed, in his speech before Tardieu, Dorgelès suggests a generation at ease with the world; he thanks Tardieu's government and the President of the Republic for facilitating the return of veterans to their

[26] *Bulletin des écrivains combattants*, March 1930, 4.

rightful place, along with the prestigious Académie Française and the Goncourt committee for the recognition they have shown veteran writers in the award of recent prizes.[27]

This recognition was short lived, however. The full effects of the Wall Street Crash were slow to be felt in France, but lasted longer here than throughout much of Europe. In 1932 this led to repeated government proposals to end pensions for war widows who had remarried and, in 1933, to reduce the war pension. The latter in particular prompted a night of rioting on 6 February 1934 in which veterans, including the UNC, played a part, resulting in sixteen deaths. Although the *Revue des vivants* and the AEC remained publicly silent on those events, the former now turned its critical eye to the Republic. Issues that year took the *Revue des vivants*' commitment to openness to all ideas literally. The February issue titled 'One Year of Hitler' contained essays by notable German émigrés such as Heinrich Mann, but each of these was countered in a section of essays under the rubric 'What Hitler Has Created' with contributions from Johann von Leers and other notable Nazi Party members; balance was thus maintained by giving an equal voice to Nazism at a time when the German authorities were also making overtures towards French veteran movements (Prost, 1977a: 177-81).

In April that year, the *Revue des vivants* joined the debate on constitutional change with a contribution from the then independent socialist and future collaborationist Marcel Déat discussing the merits of corporatism. A month later, the issue 'Reform the State' brought together the leader of France's biggest and most radical trade union, Léon Jouhaux, and the head of the Croix de Feu, Colonel de la Rocque. In October 1934, in an issue titled 'For the Referendum', Jouvenel rejected totalitarianism as a political solution to France's democratic crisis; he turned instead to the Confédération Générale as a model of corporatist governance. The latter formulated 'an original system which consisted in grouping together

[27] *Bulletin des écrivains combattants*, March 1930, 4.

veterans and producers outside party structures and around a common programme of economic organization and international security.'[28] Such issues were therefore a reminder of the role that could be played by veterans in a time of socio-political upheaval, but it should be noted that few of the essays allude to a direct or exclusive role for veterans. Rather, the war generation, in its abnegation of self and sense of national duty, offers a model beyond party-politically induced differences. In addition to this, its ability to include all social classes, from the peasant to the intellectual, meant that it could claim to represent the interests of the entire nation.

What is notable in each case, and what differentiates the *Revue des vivants*' approach from that of the national press, is the lack of any overt editorial stance. Whereas issues in the late 1920s had attempted a synthesis of views in an attempt to offer a practical, veteran perspective and solution, superficially these later issues appear to adhere more rigorously to the AEC's avowed apoliticism while simultaneously revealing an even more profound interest in the political. The *Revue des vivants* is far from apolitical, but neither is it heavily partisan: in 1934 it becomes the locus for an exchange of radical ideas (both foreign and domestic) which allow its readership to rethink the Republic.[29] The AEC therefore supported the return of Gaston Doumergue to government, replacing the government of Edouard Daladier which, despite surviving a succession of no confidence votes, resigned in the immediate wake of the 6 February riots.[30] It is hard then to see how Prost can conclude quite so categorically that veterans 'probably played a regulating, moderating and calming role' in French political life which ultimately preserved France from fascism (1997b: 184).

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[28] Henry de Jouvenel, 'Vers la démocratie directe', *La Revue des vivants*, October 1934, 8:1477-9, 1479.

[29] Millington perceives the same tendency within UNC circles at this time (2010: 555-57; 567).

[30] As Millington notes, 'The UNC considered the Doumergue administration the first step in an authoritarian reform of the regime' (2010: 572).

Nevertheless, neither do veterans or the AEC offer an entirely coherent and uniform response to the trials and tribulations of the Third Republic. Indeed, the events of February 1934 seem to have posed a series of problems for the AEC, which its silence on the matter could not mask. On the first anniversary of the riots, the AEC's General Secretary Roland Charmy felt obliged to remind members that 'Our past suffering, our present needs, our shared concerns are the ties that bind us and which politics will no doubt break.' In the same issue of the *Bulletin des écrivains combattants*, Farrère also intones: 'Politics, a dangerous source of the most dreadful divisions amongst our people, has no place in our association'.[31]

The election of the Popular Front government in May 1936, uniting socialists, the centre-left Radical Party, and the communists, further polarized French political life. It coincided with the increased involvement of several leading lights of the AEC in the Comité France-Italie, which promoted a Latin alliance with Mussolini's regime. Indeed, the possibility of Franco-Italian rapprochement through an alliance of French and Italian veterans' movements preoccupied the AEC throughout 1936 and 1937 and is reflected in the *Bulletin des écrivains combattants* of those years. At the same time as prominent members such as René Benjamin and Henry Bordeaux were reporting enthusiastically on the new Italy, others, such as Farrère, were welcoming the overthrow of Spanish Republicanism and the rise of a new authoritarian regime across the Pyrenees (Cornick *et al*, 2017).

Membership records of the mid and late 1930s show the disappearance of a number of moderates from the ranks of the AEC, perhaps prompting Charmy in February 1938 to warn members once more: 'We must be on our guard as we could well find ourselves faced with a violent crisis which will rock our great family.' Individual members remain free to commit to a political cause, he continues, but they must not bring their membership of the AEC into

[31] *Bulletin des écrivains combattants*, February 1935, 2 and16 respectively.

play when so doing.[32] A year later, he pleads: 'Let us remain the comrades and brothers we truly are…'[33] As another war approached, it was clear that a number of the AEC's members were now aligned with far-right veteran movements and parties, having espoused and promoted ideas that challenged the very foundations of Republican democracy. Others remained committed to the latter, however. Henri de Peyerimhoff's speech at the Académie Française in 1939, described as 'a retransmission of the great voice of our fallen comrades', thus decries totalitarianism of both the right and the left.[34] On the eve of war, then, the AEC seems to be divided along the same political lines that had polarized the French nation. Reference to this generational voice as the echo of the dead still found in Peyerimhoff's speech appears at best phatic, at worst desperate in its attempt to draw together the war generation one last time. It can be construed as a plea for unity in the face of disintegration, a final attempt to invoke the memory of a shared past and to revive the cult of the dead amongst a social group whose moment seems to have passed. In this the AEC's generational discourse reflects Nora's assertion that a generation is only ever united by its members' shared past, however 'ghostly and painfully sharp […]', rather than 'what lies before them and divides them' (1992: 956); all generations are therefore imbued with a sense of their own frailty to which the call to generational arms is the paradoxical response. Yet the remembrance of the dead in the 1930s reflected a continued effort on the part of veteran writers to foreground the experience of the First World War as an original, foundational moment in the lives of the millions of surviving veterans, but also within national life as a moment of unity and integrity lost. It therefore remained a powerful, nostalgic plea for all

[32] *Bulletin des écrivains combattants*, February 1938, 2.

[33] *Bulletin des écrivains combattants*, February 1939, 2.

[34] *Bulletin des écrivains combattants*, June 1939, 4-5.

French citizens to remember the unity that had been achieved by those who bore arms in 1914-1918, particularly when, as it did in 1940, the present seemed irredeemably bleak.[35]

Pétain, 'the divine surprise', and the resurrection of the veteran

Although much of the French far right rallied to support the Republic when war was declared on Germany in September 1939, some could hardly conceal their glee at the regime's collapse in the summer of 1940 and 'the divine surprise', as Charles Maurras, the principal ideologue of the monarchist Action Française, referred to Marshal Pétain's immediate creation of the French State. Pétain had operated within the sphere of influence of Maurras's movement for a number of years, yet he had also served as a minister under the Republic. He was revered as a hero of the Great War, having overseen the defence of Verdun in 1916, and it was this memory which won him the support of the French public, but also of French veterans, when, following the government's withdrawal to Bordeaux and the fall of Paris, he led the French armistice negotiations. Pétain was thus able to project himself as a unifying figure in a time of national crisis.

It was Pétain's status as veteran in particular that led so many former combatants to believe that only one of their own could rescue France from the moral and political morass that ensued defeat. Many members of the AEC threw their support behind Pétain, if not necessarily the Vichy State and its policy of collaboration, often distinguishing between their commitment to the man and their antipathy towards the regime, especially after the latter's

[35] As Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering observe, those who 'express nostalgia act as witnesses to what has over the course of time been junked, cast peremptorily aside and rendered seemingly unreachable from the present, […] express feelings about the effects of this as members of a specific generation or social group who feel temporarily displaced, strangers in a new world that seems radically disconnected from an earlier one' (2012: 112).

collapse.[36] This distancing of the AEC from the Republic had been prepared in 1934. In November that year, and as it became clear that the Republic was incapable of reforming itself along the corporatist lines favoured by many of the contributors to *La Revue des vivants*, Farrère reiterated the organization's 'most scornful disdain for all politics.' Interestingly, however, he pledged the movement's allegiance to the nation rather than to the Republic. His formula 'Whoever is French and governs as a Frenchman will have our support' is remarkably flexible and helps to understand how so many AEC members were able to make accommodations with the forces of collaboration.[37] Germain, Benjamin, Benoit, Léon Bérard, and Farrère all lent public and vocal support to the Vichy regime (Epstein, 2001: 115; 331; Valode, 2014: 282; 294-95; Quella-Villégar, 1989; Sapiro, 1999: 281; 355). Meanwhile the AEC's president from 1936 to 1944, Paul Chack, joined the pro-Nazi Parti Populaire Français, used airtime on the collaborationist Radio-Paris to denounce the Resistance and attacks against the German occupying forces, and chaired both the Cercle Aryen [Aryan Circle] and the Comité d'action anti-bolchévique [Committee for Anti-Bolshevik Action] which recruited French volunteers to serve in Nazi units on the Eastern Front, before being executed by the French authorities following Liberation (Valode, 2014: 171).[38]

The appeal of collaboration for these members lay not only in the personality of its chief in 1940. Pétains' National Revolution, the official ideology of the regime, recycled

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[36] Dorgelès' biographer, Micheline Durpray, thus notes how Dorgelès, whilst supporting Pétain throughout the war out of respect for his former commanding officer, 'had adopted a sufficiently neutral attitude to be tolerated by Vichy and the *Milice*, on the one hand, and sufficiently equivocal to appear suspect to the Germans. Some have seen in this a tactic on his part'(2000: 365).

[37] *Bulletin des écrivains combattants*, November 1934, 1-2.

[38] For a full discussion of intellectual collaboration, resistance, and the settling of literary accounts in the post-Liberation period, see Sapiro, 1999.

many elements of AEC discourse. Its tone of 'expiation, exemplary sacrifice, and national solidarity' allowed not only for the regime to blame the Republic for all the ills of the interwar years as well as for the French military's collapse (Dalisson, 2013: 143), but also for many veterans to identify with an ideology that appeared to mirror the AEC's own generational values. Indeed, Henri Pichot of the Union Fédérale made this association explicit as early as September 1940 (Millington, 2012: 1). Moreover, veterans were visibly associated with the regime through the presence of the UNC at the November commemorations of the war dead and in the Légion Française des Combattants, which merged all veterans movements (Jackson, 2001: 144), became Pétain's self-styled praetorian guard accompanying him on official visits, and which numbered 1.5 million members (Millington, 2012: 147-48).

The National Revolution consciously drew upon a discourse formulated in veteran circles and articulated by key AEC members throughout the interwar years. Indeed, it could only impose its radical agenda because it was able to call upon an authority already invested in it by veterans. Pétain thus served as a mediator between these and far-right groups, such as the Action Française, who believed they could impose their vision of the nation through the Vichy State. As Halbwachs contends, profound social change, whether radical or gradual, is achieved through the generation of new ideas within communities, ideas which are rooted in a collective memory which shapes the ethical and social life of every individual member (1992: 188). The values of a particular community may then come to the fore in society as a whole when they appear more relevant to existing social beliefs and needs at a particular moment in time. The Pétainist coup of 1940, then, was broadly consensual and only possible because some of its principal values appeared to correspond to those articulated on behalf of veterans by organizations such as the AEC and the UNC. This appearance was maintained through the various ceremonial roles accorded to veterans under the regime.

That said, consent among AEC members was never absolute. Dorgelès, for example, after initially supporting Pétain and the National Revolution, resigned from his post as a journalist with the daily *Gringoire* when the latter became increasingly anti-Semitic and then pro-Nazi (Dupray, 2000: 338-39). Indeed, during the Occupation the AEC split into two factions. Chack's attempts to turn the movement into a tool of collaboration prompted many to desert, including Pierre Chanlaine, the AEC's future president, who set up a clandestine branch free from Nazi supervision to rival Chack's AEC.[39] Chanlaine's group would form the basis of a reinvigorated AEC which would emerge after the war uniting the survivors of the First World War and 'combatant writers of the Resistance, the poets of the *maquis*'.[40]

It is therefore difficult to see in Pétain's National Revolution a generational movement or to perceive a complete coincidence of thought and belief between all members of the AEC during the war years. Moreover, it was another hero and veteran of the First World War who, in the aftermath of the Second World War, would found the generation to supersede the veterans of that first global conflict. General Charles de Gaulle, as leader of the Free French during the war, would use the figure of the *résistant* much as the AEC had attempted to do: as one around whom the nation could unite, but also as a beacon of moral and civic rectitude. The first post-Liberation commemorations of the 11 November are telling in this respect. Whereas veterans of the First World War had always been central to national and local ceremonies in the interwar years, taking precedence over any survivors of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871, the Gaullist-orchestrated national commemorations of 1944 set a precedent which would be followed in the coming years and revived under de Gaulle's presidency (1958-1969). Here, although First World War veterans were prominent, they took second place, marching behind members of the Resistance and the Free French

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[39] Octave Béliard, 'La Vie de l'AEC', *Annuaire de l'AEC*, 1948, 19-29, 24.

[40] Béliard, 'La Vie de l'AEC', 25.

(Dalisson, 2013: 164). In turn, of course, de Gaulle's authority would be contested in what is for Nora (1992) the ultimate generational event of the twentieth century: the student and worker protests of May 1968. What is often forgotten in analysis of the Resistance generation, however, is that, like the generation it superseded, it too had been crafted through a memorialist process that combined political, cultural, and, specifically, textual practices whereby, through the constant remembering and retelling of a shared experience, a new generational identity was asserted. It had done so in opposition to an earlier war generation compromised by its lukewarm defence of the Republic in the interwar years and subsequent association with collaboration, but also in an attempt to fuse diverse experiences, modes, and memories of resistance into a unitary and unifying whole (Jackson, 2001: 605-08).

Conclusion

The generation in twentieth-century France is essentially a discursive and narratological construction; it engages in a battle for supremacy with other discourses and narratives and is born through opposition. It is therefore fundamentally different to the transnational concept of the generation that informs Keightley and Pickering's thinking; the latter, modelled on the Holocaust, marked by the experience of diaspora and by the traumatic absence of a preceding generational memory, prompts in subsequent generations imaginative textual practices that attempt to forge connections between first, second, and even third generation experiences (2012: 179-85). The generation, as it was experienced in twentieth-century France, is firmly rooted in the national context, forged in times of national and international conflict, and often draws upon an 'internal economy of sacrifice' (Rowlands, 2001:142) to assert itself over its elders, but also its (potentially wayward) youth; just as First World War veterans pointed to the altruistic intentions of their own sacrifices, so too did those of the Resistance generation. And so too, it is argued, do leading veterans of May 1968, who have since taken credit for a range of social reforms, contributing to an official history of the worker and student revolt

that month as 'a family or generational drama […] – a benign transformation of customs and lifestyles that necessarily accompanied France's modernisation from an authoritarian bourgeois state to a new, liberal, modern financier bourgeoisie' (Ross, 2002: 5-6).

As much as any generation is defined by its sense of uniqueness and difference from others, so too it equally forms in response to a fundamental need for unity, a need that should draw the historian's eye to its internal diversity, division, and potential incoherence. And it is this absence or void at the heart of the generation that offers a bridge between the Keightley and Pickering's transnational generational model and that which is more typical of the French experience of the twentieth century and beyond. The entrance of veterans of the Resistance into the AEC would enlarge the notion of veterancy in France, fully republicanizing the movement in the process, but also supplanting the dominant narrative of its founding fathers. This process is then the reflection of a broader generational struggle characteristic of socio-political and cultural change in France throughout the twentieth century that is marked by a rapid succession of traumatic events conducive to the forging and confrontation of collective ideologies (Edmunds and Turner, 2002: 12). However, when reading twentieth-century French history in terms of generational conflict, we must not lose sight of those internal conflicts within the generation that speak of the fragility of both the particular generation in question and of the very concept of generation itself.

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The War Generation and Generation Wars: French Veterans and the Association des Écrivains Combattants, 1919-1945

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The War Generation and Generation Wars:
Writing the Memory of French Veterancy, 1919-1945

What determines a generation and the role it plays in constructing collective memory have been a subject of debate since the sociologist Karl Mannheim first considered the term as a social category (Pickering and Keightley, 2012: 115). Is a generation determined by a particular date or set of historical and political events? How long does a generation last? Is it a conscious or unconscious construct? What characterizes the relationship of the individual to generational identity (Nora, 1992: 937)? Faced with such questions, the concept of a war generation, and particularly of the First World War generation, seems relatively unproblematic. In France, mass conscription targeted a specific social group (men aged 18-40) who were then forged into a single generation through the shared experience of combat over a given period of time (1914-1918) and who would then gather through veterans' organisations to remember their suffering, to celebrate their camaraderie, and to remember their dead. The war generation in France would appear to exist as an empirically observable group corresponding to a particular gender, demographic, and historic moment, one that, intensely aware of its own existence, corresponds closely to Mannheim's original definition of a generation (Pickering and Keightley, 2012: 115-17).

As this article will illustrate, veteran writers, notably through the activities and publications of the Association des Ecrivians Combattants [Association of Combatant Writers], were essential to the conscious elaboration of a generational identity that was subsequently expanded to all those who had defended France in these year. This article will explore how the AEC constructed the war generation in France, examining how its successes, limitations, and legacy beyond the First World War nonetheless illustrate the ambiguities surrounding the notion of generation. It will show how the AEC mobilized the memory of the war through a range of commemorative textual practices centring on the figure of the dead combatant author in order to assert the rights and interest of veterans in a society that veterans now sought to 'correct' through the example of their generation's sacrifice. It will also explore the political choices this led AEC members to take and the consequences for French veterans, placing their struggle within a pattern of generational politics and conflict that characterizes twentieth-century France.

Founded in 1919, the AEC sought to group together writers who had seen uniformed service in order to defend their post-war professional interests, but also to recall and commemorate the name and works of those of their profession who had died during or in the wake of that conflict.[1] The AEC existed primarily as a support network for veteran writers

returning to civil society and disorientated by the 'aggressive egotism' they now found at work there, as well as the families of those who had not survived the conflict (*Annuaire*, 1927-28: 5).[2] It was in principle an apolitical movement that, particularly in its early years, assembled writers of all political shades. It also formed part of a broader movement of French veteran organizations which together, according to Antoine Prost, promoted the idea that 'the war [had] introduced a decisive generational rupture: a before and after' (1977b: 135) leading to an insurmountable opposition between veterans and an older generation of political leaders (1977b: 136). Indeed, for Robert Wohl, this rupture was already evident during the war itself 'in the feeling [among combatant writers] that it was there amid the fire and flame that the new world was coming into being' (1980: 222).

In its dedication to the cult of the war dead and its commitment to remembering the war experience, the AEC embodies Pierre Nora's assertion that 'Each generation is the product of memory, the result of a conscious attempt to remember, [conceived] through difference and opposition' (1992: 956). As we shall see in the first part of this article, the AEC constitutes a 'community in mourning', as defined by Stéphane Audouin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, a community that offers a social structure through which members can mediate and work through personal grief (2000: 231-32). The resulting socialized memory of the dead forms the basis of a collective identity that stands in contrast and often opposition to non-combatant society. Here I will argue that veteran writers draw upon the moral authority of those who died in the name of the nation, claiming to embody not only their memory but their will, in order to make socio-political claims for survivors.

In this way the AEC seeks to develop a generational identity amongst all French veterans through a nexus of 'politics and literature, power and words, understood here in their transformative magic; that is to say, their poetry' (Nora, 1992: 947), mobilizing veterans in intergenerational conflict that June Edmunds and Bryan Turner consider to the be the hallmark of modernity (2002). Writing, then, is central to the construction of the socio-political entity that we consider a generation and to the endeavours of French veterans, even if, as Chris Millington observes, these claimed to '[favour] actions over words' (2012: 6). But it is also, as Nora suggests, a means to transform the present through the telling of a particular shared memory of the past. I will therefore also consider the AEC's engagement with the politics of interwar France, its ambiguous relationship to Republican democracy, and the support of many of its leaders and membership for the autocratic Vichy regime and its leader, Marshall Pétain, during the Occupation. I will argue that, far from preserving the Republic from fascism, as Prost claims (1977b: 217-23), a significant body of veterans and certain key veteran writers,

however indirectly, helped prepare its collapse. Yet, despite significant internal political divisions, which will also be explored, the AEC contributes to a process of generational thinking and tensions that last beyond both wars.

Writing, mourning, and commemorating the dead (1914-1926)

The AEC is one of many veterans' organizations to emerge in the immediate post-war period in France. As Prost's exhaustive studies have revealed, these were diverse in scope and individual movements often corresponded to particular forms of service, regions, or even types of wounds received in combat. The AEC belongs to a group of organizations based on members' professional identity. Its origins lie, however, in the *Bulletin des écrivains* [Writers' Bulletin] published as early as November 1914 and circulated in the trenches among 'writers called to armed service' (*Bulletin*, 1914). Whilst early issues contained obituaries of the most prominent writers, details of those injured or taken prisoner, contact details of fellow writers in the services, and excerpts from recent publications, by 1916 the *Bulletin*'s main function had become the recording of combatant writers' deaths. In contrast to its original nationalist tone, sustained with regular contributions from armchair enthusiasts for mass-slaughter such as Maurice Barrès, the July 1919 issue was dedicated through an anonymous poem to writers of all nationalities: 'Born to speak to other men/They sacrificed in the same heroic action/Their life and their promise/Dead so that their silence might speak' (*Bulletin*, 1919). Between 1914 and 1919, and as the number of dead mounted, it became a memorial dedicated to hundreds of young, dead French writers, the most prominent of whom were Alain Fournier and Charles Péguy, who both died in 1914, and Guillaume Apollinaire, who survived the war only to die from Spanish flu in 1919. The compulsion to list the individual dead, to save each and every writer from the anonymity of mass, industrialized warfare and thereby to prolong his presence among a living community anticipates an anxiety that will be translated to national level in the wake of the war (Julien, 2009: 91-92).

The same memorialist function is assumed by the AEC in its manifesto of June 1919 and in its aim 'to maintain the cult of memory of those comrades who fell on the field of honour', alongside a commitment to defend the professional interests of veteran writers in what is almost immediately construed as a hostile post-war literary environment.[3] The *Bulletin des écrivains* now becomes the *Bulletin des écrivains combattants*, but the AEC and its leadership are also the driving force behind a series of other publications through which these two objectives are pursued: the five volumes of the *Anthologie des écrivains morts à la guerre* [Anthology of Writers Killed in Action] published between 1924 and 1926, the *Conteurs du*

vieux logis [Tales from the Old House], a series of volumes of short stories by veterans designed to promote their most recent writing, and *La Revue des vivants* [The Review of the Living], a monthly political and literary review that ran from 1927 to 1935.

The anthologies, despite their memorialist intent and retrospective focus, are essential to understanding the moral, civic, and ultimately political role that veteran writers are seeking to carve out for veterans more generally in the interwar period. Each anthology followed the same pattern, publishing an extract from every one of the 500 or so French writers killed in uniformed service, alongside an obituary written either by a family member or, more usually, a fellow writer and veteran. For Roland Dorgelès, the anthologies offered a way of combatting the anxiety he felt at the disappearance of writers 'whose name, in order to survive, can often only call upon a few scattered pages, a handful of notes or verses.' 'Who knows,' he goes on, 'in which trench the child genius who would have set the world alight may have fallen?' (*Anthologie,* 1925: xii; xv). Given that the aim of all writers is to live on in the written word, the loss of so many debutants is doubly cruel, according to René Doumic (*Anthologie,* 1926: vi).

The anthologies thus served as a vehicle for collective mourning, allowing the dead to live on through their own written word. They are, for Georges Lecomte, '[a] vast well-ordered cemetery full of flowers' where every page evokes a fleeting memory of a dead artist (*Anthologie,* 1924b: viii-ix). Their purpose was, as Henry de Jouvenel wrote in the foreword to the first anthology, to 'prolong their memory [of the dead] instead of allowing it to ossify' (*Anthologie,* 1924a: v). For José Germain, a founding member of the AEC, the anthologies enable him to recall the presence of the dead; dedicating his preface to one fallen comrade, he writes: 'I find you again after eight years of desperate separation, at once dead and immortal' (*Anthologie,* 1924b: xiii). There is in these writings an anguish that Freud, writing in the aftermath of the same conflict, perceives in the process of mourning whereby the ego realizes 'that the beloved object no longer exists, and demands that the libido as a whole sever its bonds with that object' (Freud, 2005: 204). The anthologies allow a process of mourning whereby individual writers can publicly grieve their fallen friends, express the pain of individual loss, recall them to life through the obituary and the dead's own final written words, and express anxiety at, but also acknowledge, their passing.[4] For Lecomte, it is in the anthologies that 'the dead live. They speak' (*Anthologie*, 1924b: ix). According to Robert de Flers, they offer 'the living thought of those who are no longer with us […] for us to reflect upon' (*Anthologie,* 1925: v).

Like Freud's mourner, the writers who contribute to the anthologies lionize the dead. In his preface to the first anthology, Henry Malherbe, first president of the AEC, explicitly mourns 'this generation which had achieved a point of human perfection' and whose loss diminishes the survivors: 'We continue to suffer from this head wound' (*Anthologie*, 1925: xii). Indeed, for Gustave Geoffroy, all who died for France, by their very sacrifice, are heroes and 'have the right to the same afterlife, the same glory' (*Anthologie*, 1926b: vi). This leads to a cult of the dead. For Malherbe, each obituary constitutes a sort of holy statue 'carved and decorated with both precision and fervour' before which 'One can kneel […] and pray (*Anthologie,* 1924a: xi). The memory of the dead must guide the living as it was in the confrontation with death that the dead writer discovered truth, transcribing this in his final words.

Malherbe, addressing the dead directly, thus admits to a feeling of inadequacy before the dead (*Anthologie,* 1924a: xiv). However, while the mourner idealizes the departed and may feel 'a great impoverishment of the ego', the ego comes to realize that, in order to continue to enjoy 'the sum of narcissistic satisfactions that it derives from being alive [it must] loosen its bonds with the object that has been destroyed' (Freud, 2005: 205; 215). The anthologies serve a valedictory purpose for Dorgelès who announces: 'The time has come to seal the funereal tomb. This is, then, the last time we shall speak of them…' (*Anthologie,* 1925: xi).

Yet, if the idealization of the dead constitutes a stage for Freud through which individual mourners pass on their way to a reaffirmation of life, within the collective context of the AEC and France's veteran community more generally the cult of the dead principally serves another purpose: that of confirming and valorizing the existence of a broader war generation. In the same preface, Dorgelès declares that the raison d'être of the AEC is to 'preserve in a time of peace a certain *espirt de guerre*', a spirit that the survivors have inherited from the dead as 'Our greatest claim is to be the friends of the dead. We alone, comrades, have not forgotten you'. The anthologies are therefore 'the testament of a generation' and the AEC is cast as spokesman for the dead (*Anthologie,* 1925: xvi). For Jouvenel the anthologies reflect the direct communication between the fallen and the surviving veteran: 'the disappeared reappear; their reanimated souls communicate once more with ours' (*Anthologie,* 1924a: v). The veteran contains within him the thoughts, memories, and the very soul of his fallen comrades, but also carries in his own written word the truth and authority associated with the dead. The dead lend an aura to the surviving veteran writer who becomes the bearer of this truth and who perpetuates the memory of this spiritual elite through his own activities.

The anthologies must be considered an essentially commemorative process rather than a pure expression of personal mourning therefore. Indeed, for Audouin-Rouzeau and Becker the cult of the war dead prevents the separation of the living from the dead and impedes mourning (2000: 255-56). In this way the anthologies are more akin to the collective commemorative practices examined by George Mosse whereby the dead are called upon in order to influence the behaviour of those who have survived them (1990: 79-80). Yet they also reveal in their combination of personal mourning and collective commemoration the social dimension of the cult of the dead, which, according to Elise Julien, can never be politically neutral (2009: 74). In the terms of Maurice Halbwachs (1992: 171-73), the private memories of individual contributors to the anthologies are therefore mediated and indeed orchestrated through the collective memory of the AEC so as to contribute to the construction of a collective, public identity which defines itself in opposition to what it perceives to be the dominant, antagonistic forces of 1920s French society.

Indeed, despite its avowed apoliticism, the AEC frequently indulges in a social critique which draws it into the realm of the political. This critique derives in general terms from all veterans' 'deception with this ungrateful, selfish and cut-throat post-war world' before which, according to Germain, the dead would cry: ' "This is not what we wanted" ' (*Anthologie*, 1924b: xvi). Claude Farrère goes so far as to claim to envy the dead: 'Happy are those who did not doubt the virtue of their sublime sacrifice! Happy are those who have not seen what we have seen, who have not known our victors' sadness' (*Anthologie*, 1926a: xii). Pierre Benoît, in the preface to the fifth and final volume, thus turns attention away from the dead and to the survivors who have been 'exposed to a thousand and one humiliations, a thousand and one injustices since the end of the war', and quotes with bitterness Georges Clemenceau's famous dictum from 1917 regarding French combatants: 'They have rights over us' (*Anthologie*, 1926b: x). Far from seeing themselves eulogized through their association with combat and the fallen, placed at the heart of the 'nation's self-representation in its war monuments and military cemeteries', as Mosse writes (1992: 74), French veterans of the AEC felt themselves marginalized, still unable in the mid-1920s to reclaim the social roles which had been theirs, let alone to enjoy recognition for their past sacrifice.

Beyond Mourning: Socio-Political Engagement (1927-1939)

For Robert de Flers, dead writers enjoyed an enviable fate, 'offering their chests [in order to defend] the genius of the French race which, suddenly, violently, yet tenderly, had asserted itself over their reason'. By way of contrast, the peasants who made up the bulk of the French

infantry were merely defending their land. Combatant writers were nevertheless at the forefront of a national movement of defence which saved French national integrity and civilization (*Anthologie*, 1925: vi-vii). The AEC can therefore claim to speak on behalf of the entire war generation and not only its members. With this in mind, Jouvenel and Malherbe created *La Revue des vivants* in February 1927, thereby helping to turn the attention of the public back onto surviving veterans and to expand the AEC's activities into the socio-political arena.

This monthly review, to which various notables of the AEC would contribute until it folded with the death of Jouvenel in 1935, proclaimed itself apolitical but open to all ideas. It therefore welcomed contributions from the leaders of prominent veteran movements as well as those it saw as the leading writers and thinkers of the day. These were largely, but not exclusively, French veterans. It marketed itself as a series of studies of the post-war world, considering international affairs (dedicating issues to fascist Italy and Franco-German relations, among others), domestic politics (examining demands for constitutional reform, as we shall see below) and literature (with special issues on Tolstoy, the fantastic, and colonial literature). It continued to promote veteran writers' work in line with the AEC's original manifesto, but the majority of issues were given over to international affairs and domestic politics, the review operating as a forum for discussion.

The period 1927-1935 was an eventful one for French veterans. Throughout the 1920s there had been a discernible degree of political and social disorientation amongst veterans as they struggled to adjust to the post-war world, and as Benoît's preface to the final *Anthologie* suggests. This struggle was equally a cultural one, as Thierry Sandre made clear in his first contribution to *La Revue* in an essay titled 'Un abîme entre les générations' [A chasm between the generations]. Here Sandre attacks Paul Souday, the literary critic of *Le Temps* who had recently derided novelists of the First World War for their inability to translate the war experience into a new literary form, stating of the war: 'it did not create a chasm. Although a tragic episode, it merely altered the map of Europe and not the intellectual face of the civilized world.' Combatant writers, he contended, 'mistake their mole hill for the Caucuses, because it's theirs and because they really saw nothing' (cited in Sandre, 1927a: 137). In response, Sandre charges that the war revealed human nature, stripping away the mask of civilization, and that writers of the pre-war era no longer possess the ability to alter human consciousness. Souday is merely protecting the interests of defunct literary forms of no relevance to the war generation whom he now summons to his support: 'Veterans, did you hear? Have you ever been so obviously and publicly misunderstood? Your Golgotha was a mere mole hill…' Souday and his generation 'died the 2 August 1914', he concludes, as he commits the *Revue* to

the defence of the literary and professional interests of those writers who saw combat and who are the expression of a generation marginalized by those who seek to turn their back on the war (137-38).

If Sandre identifies 'an unbridled bitterness, a certain energy' in the output of all veteran writers, making of them a generation if not a literary school (1927b: 489), he, like the AEC and other veteran organizations, was trying to 'maintain the illusion of a community existing between a profoundly different and diverse body of men' (Prost, 1977b: 221). This diversity extended beyond the cultural to include the political. Many veterans' movements, like the AEC, were officially apolitical. One of the principal movements, the Union Nationale des Combattants (UNC) [National Union of Combatants], as Millington reveals, nevertheless shared 'certain ideas and an antidemocratic attitude […]' (2010: 547) that overlapped with more radical right-wing groups such as the fascistic Croix de Feu, it too originally a veterans' movement. The Association Républicaine des Anciens Combattants (ARAC) [Association of Republican Veterans], however, was communist in outlook. There was, then, no single, unified veteran movement, party, or even vision which could be deemed to reflect all veterans' interests. The battle for the recognition of veterans' pension and disability rights throughout the 1920s was in part hampered by a lack of political and indeed generational unity among veterans. Veteran disorientation in the early and mid-1920s was therefore as much political as it was social and cultural.

It was not until 1930 and the appointment of the former combatant André Tardieu as prime minister that veterans felt that they were beginning to gain the social recognition that was their due and that their generation was now coming to the fore. That year, Dorgelès could claim, in a speech delivered at the AEC's annual banquet, and in Tardieu's presence, 'Today, after ten years of effort, we have all taken up our places once more. Each of us has regained his rank by dint of hard work and […] I can go so far as to say we now occupy the bridgeheads' (*Bulletin*, 1930: 4). This coincided with attempts by veterans' movements to extend their demands beyond members' immediate material concerns to include much broader civic and political issues. Following the creation of the Confédération Générale in 1927, which drew the majority of veterans' organizations into a single federation, there was a sense that veterans could finally form a cohesive whole and directly influence society. Moreover, the early 1930s also saw a growing association of the AEC with Republican institutions. The definition of veteran identity through opposition to the political was therefore not quite as absolute and characteristic of the interwar years as Millington perhaps suggests (2012: 7-9). After all, Tardieu himself was an AEC member as was Gaston Doumergue, a former President of the

Republic, while his successor, Paul Doumer, was assassinated at an AEC book festival in 1932. Indeed, in his speech before Tardieu, Dorgelès suggests a generation at ease with the world; he thanks Tardieu's government and the President of the Republic for facilitating the return of veterans to their rightful place, along with the prestigious Académie Française and the Gouncourt committee for the recognition they have granted veteran writers in particular (*Bulletin*, 1930: 4).

This recognition was short lived, however. The full effects of the Wall Street Crash were slow to be felt in France, but they would last longer here than throughout much of Europe. In 1932 this lead to repeated government proposals to end pensions for war widows who had remarried and, in 1933, to reduce the war pension. The latter in particular prompted a night of rioting on the 6 February 1934 in which veterans, including the UNC, played a part, resulting in sixteen deaths. Although the *Revue* and the AEC remained publicly silent on those events, the former now turned its critical eye to the Republic. Issues of the *Revue* that year took its commitment to openness to all ideas literally. The February issue titled 'One Year of Hitler' contained essays by notable German émigrés such as Heinrich Mann, but each of these was countered in a section of essays under the rubric 'What Hitler Has Created' with contributions from Johann von Leers and other notable Nazi Party members; balance was thus maintained by giving an equal voice to Nazism at a time when the German authorities were also making overtures towards French veterans' movements (Prost, 1977a: 177-81). In April that year, the *Revue* joined the debate on constitutional change with a contribution from the then independent socialist and future fascist Marcel Déat discussing the merits of corporatism. A month later, the issue 'Reform the State' brought together the leader of France's biggest and most radical trade union, Léon Jouhaux, and the head of the Croix de Feu, Colonel de la Rocque. In October 1934, in an issue titled 'For the Referendum', Jouvenel rejected totalitarianism as a political solution to France's democratic crisis; he turned instead to the Confédération Générale as a model of corporatist governance. The latter formulated 'an original system which consisted in grouping together veterans and producers outside party structures and around a common programme of economic organization and international security' (1934: 1479). Such issues were therefore a reminder of the role that could be played by veterans in a time of socio-political upheaval, but it should be noted that few of the essays allude to a direct or exclusive role for veterans. Rather, the war generation in its abnegation of self and sense of national duty offers a model beyond party-politically induced differences. In addition to this, its ability to include all social classes, from the peasant to the intellectual, meant that it could claim to represent the interests of the entire nation.

What is notable in each case, and differentiates the *Revue*'s approach from that of the national press is the lack of any editorial stance. Whereas issues in the late 1920s had attempted a synthesis of views in an attempt to offer a practical, veteran perspective and solution, superficially these later issues appear to adhere more rigorously to the AEC's avowed apoliticism while simultaneously revealing an even more profound interest in the political. The *Revue* is far from apolitical, but neither is it partisan: in 1934 it becomes the locus for an exchange of radical ideas (both foreign and domestic) which allow its readership to rethink the Republic.[5] The AEC therefore supported the return of Gaston Doumergue to government, replacing the government of Edouard Daladier which, despite surviving a succession of no confidence votes, resigned in the immediate wake of the 6 February riots. As Millington notes, 'the Doumergue administration the first step in an authoritarian reform of the regime' (2010: 572). It is hard then to see how Prost can conclude quite so assuredly that veterans 'probably played a regulating, moderating, and calming role' in French political life which ultimately preserved France from fascism (1997b: 184).

Nevertheless, neither do veterans or the AEC offer an entirely coherent and uniform response to the trials and tribulations of the Third Republic. Indeed, the events of February 1934 seem to have posed a series of problems for the AEC which its silence on the matter could not mask. On the first anniversary of the riots, the AEC's General Secretary Roland Charmy felt obliged to remind members that 'Our past suffering, our present needs, our shared concerns are the ties that bind us and which politics will no doubt break'. In the same issue of the *Bulletin des écrivains combattants*, Farrère also intones: 'Politics, a dangerous source of the most dreadful divisions amongst our people, has no place in our association' (*Bulletin*, 1935: 2; 16).

The election of the Popular Front government in May 1936, uniting socialists, the centre-left Radical Party, and the communists, further polarized French political life. It coincided with the increased involvement of several leading lights of the AEC in the Comité France-Italie, which promoted a Latin alliance with Mussolini's regime. Indeed, the possibility of Franco-Italian rapprochement through an alliance of French and Italian veterans' movements preoccupies the AEC throughout 1936 and 1937 and is reflected in the *Bulletin des écrivains combattants* of those years. At the same time as prominent members such as René Benjamin and Henry Bordeaux were recording enthusiastically the new Italy, others, such as Farrère, were welcoming the overthrow of Spanish Republicanism and the rise of a new authoritarian regime across the Pyrenees (Cornick et al, 2017).

Membership records of the mid and late 1930s show the disappearance of a number moderates from the ranks of the AEC perhaps prompting Charmy in February 1938 to warn

members once more: 'We must be on our guard as we could well find ourselves faced with a violent crisis which will rock our great family.' Individual members remain free to commit to a political cause, he continues, but they must not bring their membership of the AEC into play when so doing (*Bulletin*, 1938: 2). A year later, he pleads: 'Let us remain the comrades and brothers we truly are…' (*Bulletin*, 1939a: 2). As another war approached, it was clear that a number of the AEC's members were now aligned with far-right veterans' movements and parties, having espoused and promoted ideas that challenged the very foundations of Republican democracy. Others remained committed to this, however. Henri de Peyerimhoff's speech at the Académie Française in 1939, described as 'a retransmission of the great voice of our fallen comrades', thus decries totalitarianism of both the right and the left (*Bulletin*, 1939b: 4-5). On the eve of war, then, the AEC seems to have divided along the same political lines that had polarized the French nation. Reference to this generational voice as the echo of the dead still found in Peyerimhoff's speech appears at best phatic, at worst desperate. It can be construed as a plea for unity in the face of disintegration, a last attempt to invoke the memory of a shared past and to revive the cult of the dead amongst a social group whose moment seems to have passed. In this the AEC's generational discourse reflects Nora's assertion that a generation is only ever united by its members' shared past, however 'ghostly and painfully sharp […]', rather than 'what lies before them and divides them' (1992: 956). The remembrance of the dead in the 1930s reflected a continued effort on the part of veteran writers to foreground the experience of the First World War as an original, foundational moment in the lives of the millions of surviving veterans, but also within national life as a moment of unity and integrity lost. It therefore remained a powerful, nostalgic plea for all French citizens to remember the unity that had been achieved by those who bore arms in 1914-1918, particularly when, as it did in 1940, the present seemed irredeemably bleak. As Sedikides and Wildschut assert, however, nostalgia can serve as 'a dynamic force that enables the individual to look ahead and take proactive action' (2016: 319); a nostalgic, collective memory can therefore be mobilized to impact upon the political present.

Conclusion: Pétain, 'the divine surprise', and the resurrection of the veteran

Although much of the French far right rallied to the support of the Republic when war was declared on Germany in September 1939, some could hardly conceal their glee at the regime's collapse and 'the divine surprise', as Charles Maurras, the principal ideologue of the monarchist Action Française, referred to Marshall Philippe Pétain's creation of the French State in 1940. Pétain had operated within the sphere of influence of Maurras's movement for a

number of years, yet he had also served as a minister under the Republic. He was revered as a hero of the Great War, having overseen the defence of Verdun in 1916, and it was this memory which won him the support of the French public, but also of French veterans. Pétain was thus able to project himself as a unifying figure in a time of national crisis.

It was Pétain's status as veteran, however, that led so many former combatants to believe that only one of their own could rescue France from the moral and political morass that ensued defeat. Many members of the AEC threw their support behind Pétain, if not necessarily the Vichy State and its policy of collaboration, often distinguishing between their commitment to the man and their antipathy towards the regime, particularly after the latter's collapse.[6] This distancing of the AEC from the Republic had been prepared in 1934. In November that year, and as it became clear that the Republic was incapable of reforming itself along the corporatist lines favoured by many of the contributors to *La Revue*, Farrère reiterated the organization's 'most scornful disdain for all politics'. Interestingly, however, he pledged the movement's allegiance to the nation rather than to the Republic. His formula 'Whoever is French and governs as a Frenchman will have our support' is remarkably flexible and helps to understand how so many AEC members were able to make accommodations with the forces of collaboration (*Bulletin*, 1934: 1-2). Germain, Benjamin, Léon Bérard, Lecomte, and Farrère all lent public and vocal support to the Vichy regime while the AEC's president from 1936 to 1944, Paul Chack, joined the pro-Nazi Parti Populaire Français, served on the Easter Front in Nazi uniform, and was executed by the French following Liberation.

The appeal of collaboration for these members lay not only in the personality of its chief in 1940. Pétains' National Revolution, the official ideology of the regime, recycled many elements of AEC discourse. Its tone of 'expiation, exemplary sacrifice and national solidarity' allowed not only for the regime to blame the Republic for all the ills of the interwar years as well as for the French military's collapse (Dalisson, 2013: 143), but also for many veterans to identify with an ideology that appeared to mirror the AEC's own generational values. Indeed, Henri Pichot of the Union Fédérale made this association explicit as early as September 1940 (Millington, 2012: 1). Moreover, veterans were visibly associated with the regime through the presence of the UNC at the November commemorations of the war dead and in the Légion Française des Combattants, Pétain's self-styled praetorian guard that accompanied him on official visits, and which numbered 1.5 million members (Millington, 2012: 147-48).

The National Revolution consciously drew upon a discourse formulated in veteran circles and articulated by key AEC members throughout the interwar years. Indeed, it could only impose its radical agenda because it was able to call upon an authority already invested in

it by veterans. Pétain thus served as a mediator between these and the far-right groups, such as the Action Française, who believed they could impose their vision of the nation through the Vichy State. As Halbwachs contends, profound social change, whether radical or gradual, is achieved through the generation of new ideas within communities, ideas which are rooted in a collective memory which shapes the ethical and social life of every individual member (1992: 188). The values of a particular community may then come to the fore in society as a whole when they appear more relevant to existing social beliefs and needs at a particular moment in time. The Pétainist coup of 1940, then, was broadly consensual and only possible because some of its principal values appeared to correspond to those articulated on behalf of veterans by organizations such as the AEC and the UNC. This appearance was maintained through the various ceremonial roles accorded to veterans under the regime.

That said, consent among AEC members was never absolute. Benoît, despite his proximity to Action Française, refused all forms of collaboration, for example. Indeed, during the Occupation the AEC split into two factions. Chack's attempts to turn the movement into a tool of collaboration prompted many to desert, including Pierre Chanlaine, the AEC's future president, who set up a clandestine branch free from Nazi supervision to rival Chack's AEC (Béliard, 1948: 24). Chanlaine's group would form the basis of a reinvigorated AEC which would emerge after the war uniting the survivors of the First World War and 'combatant writers of the Resistance, the poets of the *maquis*' (Béliard, 1948: 24).

It is therefore difficult to see in Pétain's National Revolution a generational movement or to perceive a complete coincidence of thought and belief between all members of the AEC during the war years. Moreover, it was another hero and veteran of the First World War who, in the aftermath of the Second World War, would found the generation to supersede the veterans of that first global conflict. General Charles de Gaulle, as leader of the Free French during the war, would use the figure of the *résistant* much as the AEC had attempted to do: as one around whom the nation could unite, but also as a beacon of moral and civic rectitude. The first post-Liberation commemorations of the 11 November are telling in this respect. Whereas veterans of the First World War had always been central to national and local ceremonies in the interwar years, taking precedence over any survivors of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871, the Gaullist-orchestrated national commemorations of 1944 set a precedent which would be followed in the coming years and revived under de Gaulle's presidency (1958-1969). Here, although First World War veterans were prominent, they took second place, marching behind members of the Resistance and the Free French (Dalisson, 2013: 164).

In turn, of course, de Gaulle's authority would be contested in what is for Nora (1992) the ultimate generational event of the twentieth century: the student and worker protests of May 1968. What is often forgotten, however, is that the Resistance generation (whether Gaullist, communist or more generally *résistancialiste*), like the generation it overturned, had been crafted through a memorialist process that combined political, cultural, and, specifically, textual practices whereby, through the constant remembering and retelling of a shared experience, a new generational identity was asserted. It had done so in opposition to an earlier war generation compromised by its lukewarm defence of the Republic and subsequent association with collaboration. The generation in twentieth-century France is therefore essentially a discursive construct engaged in a battle for supremacy with other discourses. The entrance of veterans of the Resistance into the AEC would enlarge the notion of veterancy in France, fully republicanizing the movement in the process, but also supplanting the dominant narrative of its founding fathers. It was also the reflection of a broader generational struggle characteristic of socio-political change in France throughout the twentieth century (Nora, 1992: 949), which is marked by a rapid succession of traumatic events conducive to the forging and confrontation of collective ideologies (Edmunds and Turner, 2002: 12).

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[1] Article Two of the AEC's constitution, which was originally approved on the 29 June 1919 and is republished in the *Annuaire de l'Association des Ecrivains Combattants de 1914 à 1918 (1927-1928)* (1927-28). Since World War Two the AEC has been expanded to include all conflicts in which French writers have been involved.

[2] All translations are my own except where indicated.

[3] Article 2 of the AEC's constitutiuon.

[4] For a discussion of the distinction between grief and mourning, see Audouin-Rouzeau and Becker (2000: 202).

[5] Millington perceives the same tendency within UNC circles at this time (2010: 555-57; 567).

[6] Dorgelès' biographer, Micheline Durpray, thus notes how Dorgelès, whilst supporting Pétain throughout the war out of respect for his former commanding officer, 'had adopted a sufficiently neutral attitude to be tolerated by Vichy and the *Milice*, on the one hand, and sufficiently equivocal to appear suspect to the Germans. Some have seen in this a tactic on his part' (2000: 365).

Response to reviews

I have addressed all the points raised!